

2 bills would hurt oil exploration in Utah by adding new restrictions

By Kevin Van Tassell

30 September 2007

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Just in the past week, oil has gone to \$80 a barrel. Gas prices are bound to soar, and everything from shipping to manufacturing will suffer. It will no doubt cost more to heat our homes this winter. Families will feel the pinch in their pocketbooks. In the face of this bad news, there are some in Congress who, instead of looking for new ways to increase domestic production of natural gas and oil, are looking to hamstring any new exploration and production on U.S. soil.

As the Senate representative of eastern Utah's District 26, I am writing to call attention to the energy bill now being debated in Congress. Two versions of the bill have passed -- one from the House and one from the Senate. Both contain provisions that would do severe damage to domestic oil and gas exploration right here in Utah -- especially in Duchesne, Uintah and Carbon counties -- by adding layers of new regulation and restriction. The House version adds insult to injury by adding tens of billions of dollars in new taxes on domestic production, and the Senate may follow.

This is being done in a naive belief that somehow our economy can easily convert to solar or wind power at the flick of a switch.

Most of us agree that our No. 1 foreign policy challenge comes down to oil. Our dependence on foreign oil lies in some ways at the root of the war in Iraq and other problems in the Middle East. In such a circumstance, it makes no sense at all to turn our backs on supplies of oil and gas right here in our own back yard. The energy resources and jobs that can be created are important to our nation as a whole and to eastern Utah in particular.

As a Republican, I sometimes disagree with Congressman Jim Matheson. But on this issue, I must congratulate him for voting against both new restrictions on domestic fuel production and on the new taxes. Rep. Matheson put the interests of his own district ahead of party affiliation and deserves credit.

It is possible that Sen. Orrin Hatch, who also voted against the Senate bill, can yet affect the final legislation as the two houses reconcile their versions of the bill. We must call upon him to use his considerable influence to preserve jobs here in this state and encourage further independence from foreign oil and gas.

Someday we all hope that alternate forms of energy will replace some of our need for oil. We need to invest in these alternate energy sources, but in the meantime we cannot afford to ignore what is right before us. It will be years before we can significantly reduce our

need for fossil fuels, and we are far better off maximizing our domestic resources and reducing our consumption of foreign oil. Coupled with our need to create and sustain good jobs in our country and here in Utah, we should be doing all we can to encourage responsible exploration and production on our own soil along with wise use of these resources.

The Western region of the United States and especially Utah contains immense reserves of oil and natural gas and oil shale and tar sands that can contribute greatly to the stability of our energy supply. We should make the utilization of these resources a top priority. Kevin Van Tassell of Vernal is a Republican state senator.